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**"It's a bit of freedom from home and cleaning all the time":  
Schooling, Gender Relations and Gypsy Communities in  
England**

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## Schooling, Gender Relations and Gypsy Communities in England

### Introduction

Contemporary Gypsy<sup>1</sup> culture remains traditionally patriarchal 'with men primarily responsible for supporting their family financially and practically...and women taking overall responsibility for the home and children' (Cemlyn et al, 2009:226). Young people from these communities learn through communal participation whereby family-based learning becomes paramount for the preservation and continuation of their unique cultural identity (Powell, 2010; Hamilton, 2016). There is a priority on the development of vocational skills rather than an emphasis on educational qualifications (Lloyd and McCluskey, 2008). With such a strong emphasis and focus on family and group orientation and learning, 'institutional' schooling is often not necessarily seen as that important, particularly beyond primary education (Author, 2009, 2015; Derrington, 2007; Bloomer et al. 2014). What makes this situation unique is that both boys and girls from these communities are expected to adopt their gender roles at a young age, usually before the age of 14 (Powell, 2010; Bhopal, 2011; Hamilton, 2016). Thus, the majority of boys will be expected to leave school at around 11 years of age to join their older brothers, fathers and grandfathers in employment (Levinson & Sparkes, 2003, 2015; Powell, 2010). Girls, if they do go onto secondary school will usually leave to join their mothers in looking after younger siblings and the 'homeplace' on a full time basis until they get married and move out to look after their own home and children (Kendall, 1997; Cemlyn et al., 2009; Ryder et al., 2014; Derrington, 2016). Consequently, adherence to such strict gender relations is a contributing factor that often makes it difficult for these children to remain in school, and is becoming increasingly recognized as one of the key 'pull' factors away from school for these children (Derrington, 2007). It could be perceived that this non-engagement in schooling beyond primary education affects the children and young people's future aspirations. By not attending school, for example, they are unable to relate otherwise and therefore perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> This article focuses on English Romany Gypsies; there are of course a range of other Gypsy communities including Welsh Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Roma and New Age Travellers. It is recognized that each of these communities have different histories, languages and cultural traditions (see Acton, 1997; Leigeois, 1986).

unable to 'distance themselves from daily entanglements, and think about themselves and the world around them in a different way' (Tamboukou, 1999:136).

However, there is increasing evidence that suggests a change in parental attitudes towards the merits of 'institutionalised' schooling, particularly for girls and young women from these communities (Smith, 1997; Kendall, 1997; Bhopal, 2004; O'Hanlon, 2010; Powell, 2010; Bedmar & Leon, 2012; Hamilton, 2016). Such a shift in attitudes towards girls and schooling has initially been attributed to the importance of literacy and the need for girls to be able to read and write in order to engage increasingly with the institutional spaces of the mainstream and gain access to resources (Kendall, 1997; Ryder et al., 2014). From the premise that 'Space is fundamental in any exercise of power [and] is especially vital when structuring gender relations' (Tamboukou, 2003:66), this article argues that schools could potentially offer young women from such communities a different spatial environment in which to aspire to be something different and even begin to challenge the socio-spatial expectations of their communities. This article is concerned with the tensions of educational spaces (public) and home spaces (private). It is not the purpose of this article to provide a conclusive account of the schooling experiences of both Gypsy boys and girls here. The main intention is to provide further awareness of this developing research area from a spatial perspective and to stimulate further debate.

### **The context of the study**

The qualitative data on which this article draws comprised of a range of discussions with individuals from the English Romany Gypsy community. These discussions consisted of a focus group with four young women aged sixteen; two in-depth semi-structured interviews with two other young women of similar age and three mothers from the community. Further interview data was also collected with two head teachers and two Traveller Education Support Service staff (TESS). Participants from the communities were initially identified by one of the TESS who was already known to the author and had over 10 years experience of working with these communities. The author also knew the two head teachers of schools where previous ethnographic studies had been carried out. One of the parents attended an alternative education setting with their child. This setting was contacted and the author was invited to speak with the

parent. Despite such a small study sample, the focus group and semi-structured interviews, which were recorded and transcribed, lasted between 1-1 ½ hours and as such contained some rich narrative data. All participants were informed that they were taking part in a study that looked at possible tensions around school attendance. They were told that their stories would remain confidential and their identities would remain anonymous. Hence why further demographic details or information as to where the interviews took place has not been disclosed. In line with further ethical approval, after transcription the audio files were deleted and transcripts anonymised and password protected.

It is well known that there is a high level of suspicion among Gypsy communities towards those who are not part of their culture (Casey, 2014), so it was important for the author to establish their trust. In light of this, the positive relationships the author had already established with the TESS enabled them to act as 'gatekeepers' to the communities. The gatekeepers introduced the author to parents via the TESS workplaces with one interview conducted in a private office in the workplace, one on a site and the other in an alternative educational setting. It was during the workplace interview that the author obtained written consent from the parent to interview her daughter, who just happened to be visiting the workplace with her. The focus group discussion was organised by the author in an alternative Education Centre where an undergraduate student was carrying out placement experience. The Centre manager had gained informed consent from the parents of the young women who took part in the focus group as well as the other young woman who was individually interviewed at the Centre.

The data collected represented the stories (or narratives) of the participants' experiences of schooling and as such signified these individual's internal understanding of the schooling system and how they engaged with it. Their narratives also represented the external characteristics of being part of that schooling process; in that their narratives were socially co-constructed. Data was thus analysed using narrative analysis and concerned with the gendered spatial processes involved in the construction and challenges of gender relations embedded in Gypsy communities.

Narrative research lends itself to analysing stories via a spatial perspective in order to examine the power dynamics at play. In this case how gender relations played out in the minds of participants

and how educational spaces could provide them the ability to aspire to do something different. Consequently, data gathered represented the perceptions of participants in relation to their ideas and experiences of schooling and gender relations that often see boys leaving school early to gain employment and girls adopting a domestic role. As Gulson and Symes (2007:98) suggest 'stories and narratives mediate the way space is apprehended and comprehended. The language of exclusion is, by and large, spatial; who's in, who's out, at the heart, on the margins.' Places are arenas of social interaction and practice that are co-constituent of power relations and thus the embodiment of wider power relations (Massey, 2004). Space encapsulates these macro power relations that in turn are played out and replicated in the places of our everyday sociality and can be understood through our narratives (Tamboukou, 2003). As products of sociality, places determine the formation of particular types of identities and hierarchical positions that are required to reproduce the wider structural notions of relations and power in space (Lefebvre, 1991); in this case patriarchy and gender power relations.

### **Patriarchy and Gender Relations**

...the everyday routines traced by women are never unimportant, because the seemingly banal and trivial events of the everyday are bound into the power structures which limit and confine women (Rose, 1993:17).

The acquisition of gender roles is particularly astute for older Gypsy children where 'boys acquire more rights and fewer obligations than girls' (Smith, 1997:246). For these boys and girls their gender roles are still very much clearly defined and reproduced within the everyday places of their communities. This paper is informed by the idea that these gender roles are a socio-spatially constructed phenomenon (Lorber & Farrell, 1991; Riseman, 2004), which act to construct and embody particular 'cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity' (Casey, 2014:808) and played out in the places we interact with others. As McDowell (1991:11) notes, in order to establish and normalize particular power relations based on sexual difference such ideas are 'deeply embedded in our sense of ourselves as individuals in daily interactions, in institutional structures and in Western intellectual thought'. As a result 'spaces and places, and our senses of them...are gendered through and through' (Massey, 2004:186).

Consequently, places continue to embed patriarchal power relations that define the sociality of that place and set up spatial boundaries (Sibley, 1995) or 'spatial codes' (Lefebvre, 1991:16) that normalize relations around the gender divisions of men and women in a place, whereby 'women are one thing and men are the opposite' (McDowell, 1991:11). Such thinking and gender-appropriate power relations are reproduced in the structures (spatial regimes) and practices and experiences of Gypsy women and men (Casey, 2014; Hamilton, 2016), and spatially organised 'according to assigned masculine and feminine gender identities' (Jaggar: 2014:6). These gender boundaries are 'both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience' (McDowell, 1999:4).

Since the 1960s much has been written by feminist thinkers, particularly in the UK and the wider EU, Australia and the US, to challenge these power relations, predominantly in relation to women's role in society and the places they occupy (including: Oakley, 1974; Millet, 1977; Ortnor & Whitehead, 1981; Rose, 1993; Massey, 1994; Arnot *et al.*, 1996; Paechter, 1998; Blackmore, 1999; MacDowell, 1999; Tamboukou, 1999; Walby, 1990, 1997, 2011). As a result the condition of many women's lives in these countries has increasingly improved. Emancipation from the (private) domestic space has played a significant role in these improvements. Rose (2000) notes that '[f]or many women...the home is a site of hard work and perhaps physical and sexual abuse; for some, only by leaving such homes can they find a place in which to belong' (p.90). By entering the public sphere many women have been able to 'gain better access to education, employment and political representation' (Walby, 2011:4). Furthermore, Walby notes that more and more 'women of working age derive a significant part of their livelihood from waged labour' (Walby 2011:5). This paper is concerned that such a transformation from the domestic space to the public space has not been inclusive of many women from Gypsy communities, particularly married women (Casey, 2014). In turning attention to the empirical data, the article will highlight how the power relations set up by the socio-spatial construction of gender within Gypsy communities' attempts to reaffirm specific gender roles for boys and girls in these communities, which often makes it difficult for them to remain in school.

### **Place, Space and Gender**

1 This girl said to me one time, 'what is the point of me going to school, I'm going to get  
2 married and have children and tidy the trailer all day.' It is very patriarchal, girls get  
3 married very young. (TESS 1)  
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6 We can see from the above quote and the one below from one of the young women in the focus  
7 group discussion, how the domestic gender regime often spatially segregates girls and boys at a  
8 young age which makes it hard for them to attend school on a regular bases, if at all:  
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14 FG 1: I was just forever doing the same thing everyday, getting up and cleaning and  
15 cooking. Getting my dad's stuff ready and getting all my brothers stuff ready...My  
16 brother's been working with my dad since he was about 10...They are expected to be a man  
17 at 10.  
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21 However, increasing evidence that suggests a shifting landscape of parental attitudes towards the  
22 value of schooling for their daughters was confirmed by the TESS I spoke with and one of the  
23 young women I interviewed who told me that 'Boys finish education at 11 and work, girls tend to  
24 stay on and are expected to learn to read and write'. Another young woman I interviewed  
25 informed me that her mother told her 'you're going to school because you do need to learn to  
26 read and write'. This shift in thinking was also supported by the three parents I spoke with who  
27 all encouraged their daughters to remain longer in school. Having the support and  
28 encouragement of their mothers who 'allow their daughters to do something more than getting  
29 married at a young age' (Hamilton, 2016:9) is perhaps resulting in some girls and young women  
30 attending schools more readily and staying on longer beyond primary school. The role of mothers  
31 in the education and upward mobility of their children in general and daughters in particular has  
32 been a constant theme in the literature of class mobility in education (Reay, 1998; Desforges and  
33 Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall, 2008; Vincent, 2010; Sabates et al., 2011). For many Gypsy  
34 girls it is as if they have permission from their mothers to become attached to the school space so  
35 that it becomes a comfortable and legitimate cultural place for them to be in (Hamilton, 2016).  
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### 53 *Boys and Schooling*

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58 The schooling of boys has not necessarily seen an equivalent shift in thinking and cultural  
59 pressure for boys to work is perhaps often too strong to provide sons with the same educational  
60 opportunities as their sisters (Hamilton, 2016; Levinson & Sparkes, 2003). These sentiments were



exemplified by one of the head teachers I spoke with who told me that a parent with two daughters and a son told her how it was 'becoming ok for girls to stay on in school but not the case for boys' and that 'he's only twelve, he's not in school, he's not moving on with his education at all whereas my two girls are continuing'.

Furthermore, pressure from fathers and other men that require boys to go to work with them seems to be paramount and '[i]t can be difficult for boys in particular to be still at school at fifteen or sixteen as their fathers may feel they should be out earning a living' (Blaney, as cited in Tyler, 2005:110). Casey (2014,812) notes how '[m]en make the final decisions as to the length of schooling appropriate for their sons and, to a lesser extent, their daughters'. However, what may also be at play here is that the boys themselves may find gaining employment unproblematic as many of them very often aspire to follow their fathers into manual trades (Bowers, 2004). It may be that leaving school and joining their fathers in work enables them to prove their masculinity via 'apprenticeship to older male relatives' (Levison and Sparkes, 2003:590). Levinson and Sparkes (2003) found from their research that 'Males of all ages spoke with pride of going out to learn trades and skills with older males....[and] spoke of a sense of liberation' (p.599).

Due to the historical existence of 'a strong male power base' (Hamilton, 2016:3) this expectation to work is reproduced by these boys via their social relations of the lived places of their communities that continue to spatially divide them away from school. Qualities such as 'business skills, physical strength, loyalty, sexual prowess and potency' are very much valued by Gypsy men (Levison & Sparkes, 2003:588); and school is often perceived by fathers as 'inculcating boys with an altogether less masculine identity' (Levison & Sparkes, 2003:599). Although boys were expected to learn to read and write (particularly with the introduction of the driving theory test), there is a 'suspicion not only of the skills gained through exposure to the education system, but of values and attitudes that threatened traditional, masculine identities' (Levison and Sparkes, 2003:601). Such sentiments relate to earlier debates around the relationships between social class, education, work and masculinities (see Willis, 1977) whereby boys often failed to apply them selves at school as this would have invoked a challenge to their masculinity.

### *Making the break – Girls and Schooling*



Despite pressure from some families it is clear that many mothers are keen to provide their daughters with the opportunity of staying on longer at school (Hamilton, 2016). On entering a site to interview one of the parents it became clear to me how young women and mothers were arguably provided with opportunities in which to begin to discuss the gender situation of the younger girls in their communities. There were no men around, just other mothers and young women, which is typical of Gypsy sites during the day (Casey, 2014). As Kendal (1997:83) suggests 'Women control the inside of the trailer, especially when the men are away during the day, then it becomes primarily 'their' space [a] spatial environment where women can have control'.

Thus, via the daily interactions on their sites young women and mothers are arguably provided with occasions in which to maybe challenge gender relations at the lived dimension of this place. Such challenges then could potentially provide girls and young women with a different perspective on their allotted gender role, particularly those that stay on in school or return to education later. I was told by one of the young women that her mother encouraged her to stay on at school; she was told by her mother, "that you have enough time to settle down and get married when you are actually old enough". This young woman added that 'there's hundreds and hundreds of things that I want to do and obviously you can't go through this world without qualifications and you're not going to get anywhere without getting a job'.

This desire for young women to delay the domestic gender expectations of their communities could provide them with the opportunity to re-configure their own gender identity; as illustrated here by two young women from the focus group who told me:

FG 2: I wanted to go to college and be something in life, rather than stay at home, cleaning up, cooking, washing dishes, watching kids and then it's like you get to 17 and its get married.

FG 4: I don't want to get married, I want to live my life, I want to go on holiday and I want to get a job, I want to fend for myself.

At the heart of this desire to delay the adoption of their gender role, it was very clear to all the young women that I spoke with that schooling was the space that would provide them with a place in which to think differently and perhaps offer them the ability to do things outside the

gender expectations of their communities, if they wanted to. I am reminded here of the work of Tamboukou (1999) which provides evidence of how some women resist 'the space restrictions imposed upon their lives, claiming space of their own, sometimes creating new space boundaries for themselves but also imagining different spaces beyond masculinist geographical closures' (1999:127). For the young women I spoke with it was clear that the Education Center was their 'own' space. They were very aware that by extending their education would provide them with the independence that they so desired away from the spatial boundaries of their 'masculinist' communities. As Tamboukou further notes: 'Setting boundaries of their own space and taking full control of it, is certainly important in women's perceptions of independence' (2003:62). We can see here how important attending the education center was for these two other young women in gaining their independence as they told me:

FG1: I want my own independence; you know what I mean. This is why I come here trying to get qualifications. I used to hate going to my dad and asking for money when I was going out. I thought, no, I want my own bit of money.

FG3: I want to be independent because you have to sit at home and wait for him to give you money. I want to have my own job and my own independence. That's why I'm here.

Once these young women engaged with education as teenagers the social space of that environment afforded them with a potential place in which to think differently about the gender relations and expectations of their communities. Attending the Education Centre afforded these young women with a sense of freedom away from the constraints of the lived spaces of their sites. One of the young women who was 'pulled' out of the Centre for a while by her father, told me that she 'did start to miss it because it's a bit of freedom away from home and cleaning all the time'. Another young woman told me '...it's like I wake up in the morning and I'm going to do that again and again and again [cooking and cleaning] ...I'm so bored with it and then when I come here [Education Centre] I was like proper excited it was like yeah freedom'.

This sense of freedom felt by these young women in the Education Centre in relation to their 'homeplace' relates to the flexible nature of wider spaces and how the social relations with others can establish spaces as 'comfortable' places in which to challenge norms and to feel attached and

1 'belong' to a place (Tuan, 1977). Writing about her own school experience in her book 'Teaching to  
2 Transgress' (1994:3), hooks makes this point so eloquently:  
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6       Attending school then was sheer joy...School was the place of ecstasy – pleasure and  
7 danger. To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure. But to learn ideas that ran counter to  
8 values and beliefs learned at home was to place oneself at risk, to enter the danger zone.  
9 Home was the place where I was forced to conform to someone else's image of who and  
10 what I should be. School was the place where I could forget that self and, through ideas,  
11 reinvent myself.  
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16 'The danger zone' for the young Gypsy women was maybe to aspire to something other than  
17 getting married, cooking, cleaning and looking after children. They wanted to construct their own  
18 lives, get a job and become independent and thus for some maybe even challenge gender  
19 relations. It was clear from the mothers and young women I spoke with that attending school  
20 afforded many of them with the opportunity and the space to relate otherwise as well as provide  
21 them with the material resources to 'reinvent' themselves (Hamilton, 2016).  
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### 31 *Patriarchal Backlash*

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35 However, for many girls and young women to aspire to something other than the expected  
36 cultural norms of their communities can often be challenging, in line with the sentiments of hook.  
37 More often than not many fathers are reluctant for their daughters to 'reinvent' themselves. I was  
38 told by one young woman, for example, that her dad did not want her to work and that 'he totally  
39 hates girls working because he prefers me to be at home cleaning and cooking but I thought no  
40 way I want to do something else'. Consequently, pressure to leave school is still acute, and  
41 perhaps highlights how patriarchy is reproduced and concomitant gender roles reproduced at the  
42 socio-spatial level of these communities. Thus, for some girls and young women who may wish  
43 to carry on with their education post primary school it may be too 'dangerous', using hooks  
44 terminology; there is still an expectation that they will get married and look after the home.  
45 However, it should be noted that for some young women this is what they want and are keen to  
46 adopt the gender norms of their communities, 'as is their right' (Hamilton, 2016:13). This was  
47 certainly the case for one of the young women in the focus group who wanted to get married  
48 young, despite telling me that 'you have got authority over them when you're courting them  
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[boys]...But when you're married they take over the father role basically and you come under their authority. But that's better than anything really'. Helleiner (2003:169) found that once young women were married they quickly adopted their gender specific role as housewife, and as Levinson and Sparkes (2006) found, felt proud of their domestic role in the 'homeplace', which to them represented their maturity and status as a woman over non-gypsy girls. Helleiner draws on ethnographic work with Irish Travellers and notes: '...while some women reported having worked in casual jobs in laundries, supermarkets, and hotels this was usually before marriage...the overall involvement of married women in income-generating activities appeared to be minimal'.

It was clear from all the young women that I spoke to that the internalization of this idea of pride and status to get married is good for the community and the reputation of young women. However, for some this was not enough, and they were happy to challenge this destiny:

FG1: I'd like to be married now.

FG2: What for?

FG4: You're going to be in the trailer probably, 18-years-old cooking and cleaning.

FG1: Yeah I know but I don't go anywhere, as it is I might as well be married the way I am now. Because all I'm doing is cleaning and staying at home, what's the difference?

As the discussion went on it was clear that perhaps peer pressure from other young women in these communities to get married was part of the covert gender regime, perpetuated by certain young women. For Hamilton (2016:11) there still remains 'significant intolerance by some females within the community against' those women who want to remain in school and delay getting married. She notes how sometimes this would even lead to these women being bullied and made to feel guilty by other older women who were resistant to their daughters staying on in school. However, it is usually the fathers that would often prevent their daughters staying on in school in order to ensure they were on track to marry and adopt a conventional domestic role. One of the young women I interviewed told me: 'I always had a choice whether I wanted to go to school. But then as I got older my dad didn't want me in school anymore...So he pulled me out of school and he said "That's your final year now" ...because he prefers me to be at home cleaning and cooking'.

1 She went on to tell me how her mother (now passed away) was keen for her to carry on at school  
2 despite her father's resistance.  
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4 According to one of the TESS, although they had also noticed a shift in thinking towards girls'  
5 attendance at school they often also encountered this type of resistance from fathers for their  
6 daughters to remain in school. On speaking with one of the head teachers it was further  
7 highlighted how patriarchy plays a key role in ensuring girls are 'on track' to marry and adopt  
8 their traditional gender roles within their communities and how many other mothers do not  
9 support their daughters' aspirations for change:  
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18 ...We've got a bright girl in year 3 [7-8 years of age], but her...Mum is adamant that she  
19 will not go further than the end of Key Stage 2 [end of primary school at age 11], "she's  
20 going to be a mammy and this is all we want for her", her mother told me, and I've sort of  
21 said to her, but you know I've read in the Traveller Times about girls going to university,  
22 having a career; but she said "No those are the people who get pregnant before they're 16,  
23 those are the people who get divorced, we're not having that".  
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29 These sentiments perhaps expose the fear that some parents have about allowing their children to  
30 remain in school and demonstrates hooks (1994) 'danger zone'. It is clear that the spaces of school  
31 expose children to other ways of thinking and maybe even become places that could lead to the  
32 construction of alternative identities (Hamilton, 2016). As Massey (1994:181-2) notes: 'The fact of  
33 escape from the spatial confines of the home is in itself a threat...in two ways: that it might subvert  
34 the willingness of women to perform their domestic roles and that it gave them entry into another,  
35 public, world – a life not defined by family and husband'.  
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#### 44 *Policing the gender boundaries*

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49 Parental fear of mixing with others from non-traveller communities was also noted during the  
50 interview with one of the head teachers, who told me that 'some parents are fearful that their  
51 daughters will spread their wings, will meet non-Traveller boys and marry out of the culture'.  
52 Consequently, increasingly 'Traveller women are subject to strict moral codes regarding their  
53 sexuality' (Kendall, 1997:80) and as a result fathers often police their whereabouts, forbidding  
54 them to go anywhere on their own, particularly the older young women (Powell, 2010). I was told  
55 during the focus group that:  
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2 FG2: We can't go anywhere on our own.  
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5 FG3: He [father] only let me come here to chaperone my sister, he didn't want me to come  
6 here [Education Centre].  
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9 FG1: The first time I came here xxxxxx [older sister] had to come with me because I'm not  
10 allowed to come on my own.  
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14 Girls are therefore 'subject to much more parental control' (Powell, 2010:485) and thus spatially  
15 restricted on where they can go and who they can see outside the spaces of their communities.  
16 They are even chaperoned when outside the boundaries of their communities. The young women  
17 from the focus group went on to tell me about how their movements were restricted and that  
18 'you've always got to have somebody with you to vouch for you'. However, boys from the  
19 community do not face such restrictions and are 'allowed just to go off and go out with their  
20 girlfriends or whatever' one of the young women told me. Another young woman noted that 'a  
21 girl's got to live up to her name, how she dresses, how she acts, who she goes about with, what  
22 she does, but boys can do what they want'. These sentiments clearly highlight the gender  
23 divisions between girls and boys in these communities and expose the power relations relating to  
24 the re-grouping of hegemonic masculinities. As Crickley (1992) reminds us:  
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38 ...when an ethnic group is under attack from external dominant groups, their oppressive  
39 control of female sexuality may be seen as a way of maintaining group boundaries as well  
40 as providing males in the group, already oppressed elsewhere, with ways of exercising  
41 some domination (p.106).  
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45 Consequently, men control women's space - the 'natural' sphere of Gypsy women is within the  
46 public space of the home where it is easy to police their behaviour. When stepping outside the  
47 community space, the policing of their behaviour and time are achieved by not allowing them to  
48 be on their own. Consequently, girls are restricted outside the private spatial location of the  
49 Gypsy environment. Much has been written about the public/private divide (Rubin, 1975; Ortner  
50 and Whitehead, 1981; Sassoon, 1987; Pattenman, 1988; Landes, 1998) 'each assumed to be the  
51 'natural' sphere of one or the other sex' (McDowell, 1999:31). Women have traditionally been  
52 associated with private space and men public space and 'that between the public and the private,  
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between inside and outside – plays a central role in the social construction of gender divisions’ (McDowell, 1999:12).

For many white feminists, this division between private space and public space for many women in Western Europe is ‘one of the most oppressive aspects of everyday spaces’ (Rose, 1993:17) which has long been associated with patriarchal power (Oakley, 1974; Millet, 1977; Walby, 1990). Such divisions are still very much a significant part of the understanding of Gypsy communities, which in turn naturalizes the divisions that the ‘homeplace’ is the women’s sphere and outside of that is the men’s sphere and their responsibility, yet only in relation to their economic activity. It is very interesting that today Gypsy women have become more and more involved in dealing with the demands of mainstream institutions that take them out of the ‘private’ community space into the ‘public’ spaces of the mainstream. Consequently, it has become even more important in terms of patriarchal power for men to assert their dominance over their daughters to ensure that they get married within the community and remain in the ‘homeplace’.

Maybe ironically, during the focus group the young women made it clear that they respected the word of their fathers’ and how important it was for them to make their fathers’ happy. They also told me that their reputation amongst others in the community was important to how they were perceived by others and their parents, with one of them noting that ‘if you’re not clean you get talked about...but as long as our home is clean that’s the main thing’. As Tamboukou notes ‘[W]omen’s sense of alienation from the everyday spaces of their lives is related to a fear, that they are always watched and evaluated’ (1999:128). So, despite these young women’s attitudes towards their own independence, it was very acute that they were well aware of the deep-rooted community ‘rules’ surrounding women and girls in public spaces, and the importance placed on their reputation within the community. Likewise, such ‘rules’ were also used by the young women themselves in which to compare themselves and judge others, arguably colluding with the patriarchal ‘regimes’ of the community (Hamilton, 2016). However, despite this deep-rooted understanding, at the same time it was also clear to the young women I spoke with that they were determined to get the most from education in order to protect their own independence, which has become extremely important to them:

FG2: ...if you did get married...I'd still want that job...then I can get things for my own self, knowing that I got there and I've done it myself. So if we did have a divorce, he can't turn around and say, "Well, give me such and such back."

## **Conclusion**

This article provides further empirical insight into of how gender relations are a key factor that often pull children and young people from Traveller communities away from attending school. Boys and girls are expected to leave school between the ages of 11-14. Girls are required to look after younger siblings and adopt a domestic role, whilst boys gain employment with their fathers and other men from the community. They are thus socialized to associate the 'homeplace', or private sphere, with their mothers and the outside, or public sphere, with their fathers.

However, with increasing evidence that many more children and young people, but particularly girls and young women, are staying on in school these children and young people are experiencing a different space. They are mixing and socialising with non-gypsy others and relating with them throughout the course of the day. The more they engage and socialize with others in this different space the more the school becomes can become a place in which to belong and aspire to something different. Although they are expected to marry and adopt a domestic role within their communities, as well as be careful of whom they mix with, engaging in education is allowing them to realise their independence and future aspirations. Such immersion in this different space away from the confines of their communities these girls and young women are free to express themselves differently. They can even perhaps develop an alternative identity and socio-spatial gender identity in order to do things otherwise and 'reinvent' themselves. Therefore, for young women, there is more possibility of transformation, of being drawn in to a 'more public gender regime' (Walby, 1997: 62) with more diverse gender identities associated with it.

It is perhaps this determination to do well and get the required resources to find work that has the potential to 'chip away' at the domestic gender regimes of these communities in which 'the power of the patriarch is weakened and the rights of women...proclaimed' (Kitchens, 2007 as cited in Powell, 2010:480). With the backing of their mothers to remain in education for longer many young Gypsy women maybe provided with the potential to make this break. However, boys and

young men are different, they are often eager to get to work with their fathers and will leave school at age 11, if they attend at all. The sociality surrounding masculine identities within the homeplace becomes their everyday reality. Schooling may have become increasingly normalised as a place that maybe ok for girls for a while in order to learn to read and write, whilst boys must leave as soon as possible to learn a trade in order to one day support their own families. Therefore, it is increasingly likely that boys who are socialized to adopt at a young age the conventional regimes of gender relations will in turn continue to reproduce the patriarchal control of women. Further research with these communities is required, as despite the positive increase in attendance at school by many girls and young women, it remains a real challenge for them to stay in school long enough in order to gain qualifications required for future employment outside of their communities.

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"It's a bit of freedom from home and cleaning all the time": Schooling, Gender  
Relations and Gypsy Communities in England

Abstract

Much has been written over the past 50 years about the concerns associated with the educational underachievement of Gypsy<sup>1</sup> children in England. This work has usually focused on ethnicity and mobility as key factors that affect school attendance. However it is only relatively recently that a concern with gender relations has entered the debate. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to provide an empirically driven contribution to this fledgling area of enquiry. In line with the idea that space and place are fundamental in formulating gender relations a further aim of this article is to frame this phenomenon within a socio-spatial context. This article draws on semi-structured interview material and a focus group discussion about the educational experiences and aspirations of three mothers and six young women from the community. Further interview materials were collected from two head teachers with Gypsy children in their schools and two Traveller Education Support Staff. This article finds how educational 'public' space are providing a place for girls and young women to think differently and even begin to challenge the gender regimes embedded within the 'private' space of their communities.

Key words:

Schooling, Challenging Gender Relations, Gypsies, Space.

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<sup>1</sup> This article focuses on English Romany Gypsies, often identified as English Gypsies or English Travellers; there are of course a range of other Gypsy communities including Welsh Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Roma and New Age Travellers. It is recognized that each of these communities have different histories, languages and cultural traditions (see Acton, 1997; Leigeois, 1986).

“It’s a bit of freedom from home and cleaning all the time”: Schooling, Gender Relations and Gypsy Communities in England

**Introduction**

Contemporary Gypsy culture remains traditionally patriarchal ‘with men primarily responsible for supporting their family financially and practically...and women taking overall responsibility for the home and children’ (Cemlyn et al, 2009:226). Young people from these communities learn through communal participation whereby family-based learning becomes paramount for the preservation and continuation of their unique cultural identity (Powell, 2010; Hamilton, 2016). There is a priority on the development of vocational skills rather than an emphasis on educational qualifications (Lloyd and McCluskey, 2008). With such a strong emphasis and focus on family and group orientation and learning, ‘institutional’ schooling is often not necessarily seen as that important, particularly beyond primary education (Author, 2009, 2015; Derrington, 2007; Bloomer et al. 2014). What makes this situation unique is that both boys and girls from these communities are expected to adopt their gender roles at a young age (Powell, 2010; Bhopal, 2011; Hamilton, 2016), and awarded early adulthood status by the age of 14 (Myers et al. 2010; O’Hanlon, 2010). The majority of boys will be expected to leave school at around 11 years of age to join their older brothers, fathers and grandfathers in employment (Levinson & Sparkes, 2003, 2015; Powell, 2010). Girls, if they do go onto secondary school will usually leave to join their mothers in looking after younger siblings and the ‘homeplace’ on a full time basis until they get married and move out to look after their own home and children (Kendall, 1997; Cemlyn et al., 2009; Ryder et al., 2014; Derrington, 2016). Adherence to such strict gender relations is a contributing factor that often makes it difficult for these children to remain in school, and is becoming increasingly recognized as one of the key ‘pull’ factors away from school for these children (Derrington, 2007). It could be perceived that this non-engagement in schooling beyond primary education affects the children and young people’s future aspirations. By not attending school, for example, Children are unable to relate otherwise and therefore perhaps unable to ‘distance themselves from daily entanglements, and think about themselves and the world around them in a different way’ (Tamboukou, 1999:136).

However, there is increasing evidence that suggests a change in parental attitudes towards the merits of 'institutionalised' schooling, particularly for girls and young women from these communities (Smith, 1997; Kendall, 1997; Bhopal, 2004; O'Hanlon, 2010; Powell, 2010; Bedmar & Leon, 2012; Hamilton, 2016). Such a shift in attitudes towards girls and schooling has initially been attributed to the importance of literacy and the need for girls to be able to read and write in order to engage increasingly with the institutional spaces of the mainstream and gain access to resources (Kendall, 1997; Ryder et al., 2014). From the premise that 'Space is fundamental in any exercise of power [and] is especially vital when structuring gender relations' (Tamboukou, 2003:66), this article is interested in how spaces are produced via social relations in places. That is to say that places determine the formation of particular types of identities and hierarchical positions that are required to reproduce the wider structural notions of relations and power in space (Lefebvre, 1991); in this case patriarchy and gender power relations. This article is thus concerned with the tensions of educational spaces (public) and home spaces (private) and argues that schools could potentially offer young women from such communities a different spatial environment in which to aspire to be something different and even begin to challenge the socio-spatial expectations of their communities.

It is not the purpose of this article to provide a conclusive account of the schooling experiences of both Gypsy boys and girls. The main intention is to provide further awareness of this developing research area that focuses on gender from a spatial perspective in order to stimulate further debate.

### **The context of the study**

The qualitative data on which this article draws comprised of a range of discussions with individuals from the indigenous English Romany Gypsy community. These discussions, conducted in English, consisted of a focus group with four young women aged sixteen, two in-depth semi-structured interviews with two other young women of similar age and three mothers from the community. Further interview data was also collected from two head teachers and two Traveller Education Support Service staff (TESS). As questions were kept to a minimum all

1 participants were free to openly share their experiences, and as such generated some in-depth  
2 data.  
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4 Participants from the communities were initially identified by one of the TESS who was already  
5 known to the author and had over 10 years' experience of working with these communities. The  
6 author also knew the two head teachers of schools where previous ethnographic studies had been  
7 carried out. One of the parents attended an alternative education setting with their child. This  
8 setting was contacted and the author was invited to speak with the parent. Despite such a small  
9 study sample, the focus group and each of the semi-structured interviews, which were recorded  
10 and transcribed by the author, lasted between 1-1 ½ hours and as such contained some rich  
11 narrative data. Needless to say, information presented in this article cannot be presented, as a  
12 representative picture for all English Romany Gypsies, and thus further data is required.  
13 However, what is presented here is based on original data and does go some way in illustrating  
14 some of the key factors concerning gender relations and the schooling and these communities.  
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29 All participants were informed that they were taking part in a study that looked at possible  
30 tensions around school attendance. They were told that their stories would remain confidential  
31 and their identities would remain anonymous. Therefore further demographic details or  
32 information as to where the interviews took place has not been disclosed. In line with further  
33 ethical approval, after transcription the audio files were deleted and transcripts anonymised and  
34 password protected.  
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43 It is well-known that there is a high level of suspicion among Gypsy communities towards those  
44 who are not part of their culture (Casey, 2014), so it was important for the author to establish trust.  
45 In light of this, the positive relationships the author had already developed with the TESS enabled  
46 them to act as 'gatekeepers' to the communities. The gatekeepers introduced the author to parents  
47 via the TESS workplaces with one interview conducted in a private office in the workplace, one on  
48 a site and the other in an alternative educational setting. It was during the workplace interview  
49 that the author obtained written consent from the parent to also interview her daughter. The  
50 focus group discussion was organised by the author in an alternative Education Centre where an  
51 undergraduate student was carrying out placement experience. The Centre manager had gained  
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informed consent from the parents of the young women who took part in the focus group as well as the other young woman who was individually interviewed at the Centre.

Due to the in-depth nature of the empirical data collected, this data represented the stories (or narratives) of the participants' experiences of schooling and as such signified these individual's internal understanding of the schooling system and how they engaged with it. Their narratives also represented the external characteristics of being part of that schooling process; in that their narratives were socially co-constructed. Data was thus analysed using narrative analysis and concerned with the gendered spatial processes involved in the construction and challenges of gender relations embedded in Gypsy communities.

Narrative research lends itself to analysing stories via a spatial perspective in order to examine the power dynamics at play. In this case how gender relations played out in the minds of participants and how educational spaces could provide them the ability to aspire to do something different. Consequently, data gathered represented the perceptions of participants in relation to their ideas and experiences of schooling and gender relations that often see boys leaving school early to gain employment and girls adopting a domestic role. As Gulson and Symes (2007:98) suggest 'stories and narratives mediate the way space is apprehended and comprehended. The language of exclusion is, by and large, spatial; who's in, who's out, at the heart, on the margins.'

Places are arenas of social interaction and practice that are co-constituent of power relations and thus the embodiment of wider power relations (Massey, 2004). Space encapsulates these macro power relations that in turn are played out and replicated in the places of our everyday sociality and can be understood through our narratives (Tamboukou, 2003). As products of sociality, places determine the formation of particular types of identities and hierarchical positions that are required to reproduce the wider structural notions of relations and power in space (Lefebvre, 1991); in this case gender power relations.

### **Patriarchy and Gender Relations**



1 ...the everyday routines traced by women are never unimportant, because the seemingly  
2 banal and trivial events of the everyday are bound into the power structures which limit  
3 and confine women (Rose, 1993:17).  
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6 The acquisition of gender roles is particularly astute for older Gypsy children where 'boys acquire  
7 more rights and fewer obligations than girls' (Smith, 1997:246). For these boys and girls their  
8 gender roles are still very much clearly defined and reproduced within the everyday places of  
9 their communities. This article is informed by the idea that these gender roles are a socio-  
10 spatially constructed phenomenon (Lorber & Farrell, 1991; Risman, 2004), which act to construct  
11 and embody particular 'cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity' (Casey, 2014:808) and  
12 played out in the places we interact with others. As McDowell (1999:11) notes, in order to  
13 establish and normalize particular power relations based on sexual difference such ideas are  
14 'deeply embedded in our sense of ourselves as individuals in daily interactions, in institutional  
15 structures and in Western intellectual thought'. As a result 'spaces and places, and our senses of  
16 them...are gendered through and through' (Massey, 2004:186).  
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31 Consequently, places continue to embed patriarchal power relations that define the sociality of  
32 that place and set up spatial boundaries (Sibley, 1995) or 'spatial codes' (Lefebvre, 1991:16) that  
33 normalize relations around the gender divisions of men and women in a place, whereby 'women  
34 are one thing and men are the opposite' (McDowell, 1991:11). Such thinking and gender-  
35 appropriate power relations are reproduced in the structures (spatial regimes) and practices and  
36 experiences of Gypsy women and men (Casey, 2014; Hamilton, 2016), and spatially organised  
37 'according to assigned masculine and feminine gender identities' (Jaggar: 2014:6). These gender  
38 boundaries are 'both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be  
39 excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience' (McDowell, 1999:4).  
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51 Since the 1960s much has been written by feminist thinkers, particularly in the UK and the wider  
52 EU, Australia and the US, to challenge these power relations, predominantly in relation to  
53 women's role in society and the places they occupy (including: Oakley, 1974; Millet, 1977; Ortnor  
54 & Whitehead, 1981; Rose, 1993; Massey, 1994; Paechter, 1998; Blackmore, 1999; McDowell, 1999;  
55 Tamboukou, 1999; Walby, 1990, 1997, 2011). As a result the condition of many women's lives in  
56 these countries has increasingly improved. Emancipation from the (private) domestic space has  
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played a significant role in these improvements. Rose (2000) notes that '[f]or many women...the home is a site of hard work and perhaps physical and sexual abuse; for some, only by leaving such homes can they find a place in which to belong' (p.90). By entering the public sphere many women have been able to 'gain better access to education, employment and political representation' (Walby, 2011:4). Furthermore, Walby notes that more and more 'women of working age derive a significant part of their livelihood from waged labour' (Walby 2011:5). This article is concerned that such a transformation from the domestic space to the public space has not been inclusive of many women from Gypsy communities, particularly married women (Casey, 2014). What exacerbates the spatial marginalisation from public space for women from these communities is the wider context of discrimination they experience due to the historical stigmatization of mobile communities across Europe (Picker, 2017). Shubin (2011) notes how their mobility is not viewed as 'respectable', and simply associated with avoiding being governable. Further work from Humphries (2017:1193) highlights further how state governance frames particular discourse around motherhood, which produces and organises 'specific types of behaviour'. By adopting an intermittent school attendance record due to being mobile, such communities are often then perceived as not taking the education of their children seriously. Consequently, when engaging with the institutional spaces of the mainstream world, these communities remain 'othered' and often struggle to become accepted by all schools (Author, 2017).

Rather than a focus on ethnicity and racism, in turning attention to the empirical data, this article will highlight how the power relations set up by the socio-spatial construction of gender within Gypsy communities' attempt to reaffirm specific gender roles for boys and girls in these communities, which often makes it difficult for them to remain in school.

### **Place, Space and Gender**

This girl said to me one time, 'what is the point of me going to school, I'm going to get married and have children and tidy the trailer all day.' It is very patriarchal, girls get married very young. (TESS 1)

We can see from the above quote and the one below from one of the young women in the focus group discussion, how the domestic gender regime often spatially segregates girls and boys at a young age which makes it hard for them to attend school on a regular bases, if at all:

FG 1: I was just forever doing the same thing every day, getting up and cleaning and cooking. Getting my dad's stuff ready and getting all my brothers stuff ready...My brother's been working with my dad since he was about 10...They are expected to be a man at 10.

Therefore by spending more time within the 'private' space of the community rather than the 'public' space of the school and mixing with others, these young men and women are socialized to accept their domestic role. However, increasing evidence that suggests a shifting landscape of parental attitudes towards the value of schooling for their daughters was confirmed by the TESS I spoke with and one of the young women I interviewed who told me that 'Boys finish education at 11 and work, girls tend to stay on and are expected to learn to read and write'. Another young woman I interviewed informed me that her mother told her 'you're going to school because you do need to learn to read and write'. This shift in thinking was also supported by the three parents I spoke with who all encouraged their daughters to remain longer in school. Having the support and encouragement of their mothers who 'allow their daughters to do something more than getting married at a young age' (Hamilton, 2016:9) is perhaps resulting in some girls and young women attending schools more readily and staying on longer beyond primary school. The role of mothers in the education and upward mobility of their children in general and daughters in particular has been a constant theme in the literature of class mobility in education (Reay, 1998; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall, 2008; Vincent, 2010; Sabates et al., 2011). For many Gypsy girls it is as if they have permission from their mothers to become attached to the school space so that it becomes a comfortable and legitimate cultural place for them to be in (Hamilton, 2016). Thus, once in the 'public' space of some schools, Gypsy girls are able to mix and interact with non-gypsy others where they can explore ideas that may be counter to the domestic 'private sphere' of their communities.

### *Boys and Schooling*

The schooling of boys has not seen an equivalent shift in thinking and cultural pressure for boys to work is perhaps often too strong to provide sons with the same educational opportunities as their sisters (Hamilton, 2016; Levinson & Sparkes, 2003). These sentiments were exemplified by one of the head teachers I spoke with who told me that a parent with two daughters and a son told *her* how it was 'becoming ok for girls to stay on in school but not the case for boys' and that 'he's only twelve, he's not in school, he's not moving on with his education at all whereas my two girls are continuing'. With these boys being 'pulled' out of school early and less able to mix with others, than Gypsy girls, these Gypsy boys are less likely to get an opportunity to think differently about their lives.

Furthermore, pressure from fathers and other men that require boys to go to work with them seems to be paramount and '[i]t can be difficult for boys in particular to be still at school at fifteen or sixteen as their fathers may feel they should be out earning a living' (Blaney, as cited in Tyler, 2005:110). Casey (2014:812) notes how '[m]en make the final decisions as to the length of schooling appropriate for their sons and, to a lesser extent, their daughters'. However, what may also be at play here is that the boys themselves may find gaining employment unproblematic as many of them very often aspire to follow their fathers into manual trades (Bowers, 2004). One mother told me, for example, that her 11 year old son "can't wait to get to work, he's nagging me now". It may be that leaving school and joining their fathers in work enables them to prove their masculinity via 'apprenticeship to older male relatives' (Levison and Sparkes, 2003:590). Levinson and Sparkes (2003:599) found that 'Males of all ages spoke with pride of going out to learn trades and skills with older males....[and] spoke of a sense of liberation'.

Due to the historical existence of 'a strong male power base' (Hamilton, 2016:3) this expectation to work is reproduced by these boys via their social relations of the lived places of their communities that continue to spatially divide them away from school. Qualities such as 'business skills, physical strength, loyalty, sexual prowess and potency' are very much valued by Gypsy men (Levison & Sparkes, 2003:588); and school is often perceived by fathers as 'inculcating boys with an altogether less masculine identity' (Levison & Sparkes, 2003:599). Although boys were expected to learn to read and write (particularly with the introduction of the driving theory test), there is a 'suspicion not only of the skills gained through exposure to the education system, but of values

and attitudes that threatened traditional, masculine identities' (Levison and Sparkes, 2003:601). Such sentiments relate to earlier debates around the relationships between social class, education, work and masculinities (see Willis, 1977) whereby boys often failed to apply themselves at school as this would have invoked a challenge to their masculinity.

### *Making the break – Girls and Schooling*

Despite pressure from some families it is clear that many mothers are keen to provide their daughters with the opportunity of staying on longer at school (Hamilton, 2016). On entering a site to interview one of the parents it became clear to me how young women and mothers were arguably provided with opportunities in which to begin to discuss the gender situation of their daughters. There were no men around, just other mothers, young women and children, which is typical of Gypsy sites during the day (Casey, 2014). As Kendal (1997:83) suggests 'Women control the inside of the trailer, especially when the men are away during the day, then it becomes primarily 'their' space [a] spatial environment where women can have control'.

Thus, via the daily interactions on their sites young women and mothers are arguably provided with occasions in which to maybe challenge gender relations at the lived dimension of this place. I was told by one of the young women, for example, that her mother encouraged her to stay on at school; and was told "that you have enough time to settle down and get married when you are actually old enough". This young woman added that 'there's hundreds and hundreds of things that I want to do and obviously you can't go through this world without qualifications and you're not going to get anywhere without getting a job'. Such ideas could potentially then be developed further when in schools whilst socializing and mixing with others away from their communities.

The desire for young women to delay the domestic gender expectations of their communities could provide them with the opportunity to re-configure their own gender identity; as illustrated here by one of the young women from the focus group who told me:

FG 2: I wanted to go to college and be something in life, rather than stay at home, cleaning up, cooking, washing dishes, watching kids and then it's like you get to 17 and its get married.

At the heart of this desire to delay getting married and adopting their gender role, was clearly related to getting an education. It was very clear to all the young women that I spoke with, for example, that schooling was the space that would provide them with a place in which to think differently and perhaps offer them the ability to do things outside the gender expectations of their communities. In this second quote from another one of the young women in the focus group, it is clear that education is providing a different route, other than marriage, whereby education will lead to employment at the end of it:

FG 4: I don't want to get married, I want to live my life, I want to go on holiday and I want to get a job, I want to fend for myself.

I am reminded here of the work of Tamboukou (1999) which provides evidence of how some women resist 'the space restrictions imposed upon their lives, claiming space of their own, sometimes creating new space boundaries for themselves but also imagining different spaces beyond masculinist geographical closures' (1999:127). For the young women I spoke with it was clear that the Education Center was enabling them to 'claim their own space'. They were very aware that by extending their education would provide them with the independence that they so desired away from the spatial boundaries of their 'masculinist' communities. As Tamboukou (2003:62) further notes: 'Setting boundaries of their own space and taking full control of it, is certainly important in women's perceptions of independence'. We can see here by the following sentiments from two of the young women how by taking control of their education would provide them with independence and the ability to have their own money:

FG1: I want my own independence; you know what I mean. This is why I come here trying to get qualifications. I used to hate going to my dad and asking for money when I was going out. I thought, no, I want my own bit of money.

FG3: I want to be independent because you have to sit at home and wait for him [husband] to give you money. I want to have my own job and my own independence. That's why I'm here.

It is clear that for these girls attending the Education Centre would eventually lead to employment and therefore economic independence. This 'public' space afforded these young women a sense of freedom away from the constraints of the 'private' lived spaces of their sites. One of the young



women who was 'pulled' out of the Centre for a while by her father, told me that she 'did start to miss it because it's a bit of freedom away from home and cleaning all the time'. Another young woman told me '...it's like I wake up in the morning and I'm going to do that again and again and again [cooking and cleaning] ...I'm so bored with it and then when I come here [Education Centre] I was like proper excited it was like "yeah freedom"'.  
I was like proper excited it was like "yeah freedom".

This sense of freedom felt by these young women in the Education Centre in relation to their 'homeplace' relates to the flexible nature of wider spaces and how the social relations with others can establish spaces as 'comfortable' places in which to challenge norms and to feel attached and 'belong' to a place (Tuan, 1977). Writing about her own school experience in her book 'Teaching to Transgress' (1994:3), hooks makes this point eloquently:

Attending school then was sheer joy...School was the place of ecstasy – pleasure and danger. To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure. But to learn ideas that ran counter to values and beliefs learned at home was to place oneself at risk, to enter the danger zone. Home was the place where I was forced to conform to someone else's image of who and what I should be. School was the place where I could forget that self and, through ideas, reinvent myself.

'The danger zone' for the young Gypsy women I spoke with was maybe to aspire to something other than getting married, cooking, cleaning and looking after children. They wanted to construct their own lives, get a job and become independent and thus for some maybe even challenge gender relations. It was clear from the mothers and young women I spoke with that attending school afforded many of them with the opportunity and the space to relate otherwise as well as provide them with the material resources to 'reinvent' themselves (Hamilton, 2016) via social relations with non-gypsy others.

### ***Patriarchal Backlash***

However, for many girls and young women to aspire to something other than the expected cultural norms of their communities can often be challenging. More often than not many fathers are reluctant for their daughters to 'reinvent' themselves. I was told by one young woman, for example, that her father did not want her to work and that 'he totally hates girls working because

he prefers me to be at home cleaning and cooking “but I thought no way I want to do something else”. Consequently, pressure to leave school is still acute, and perhaps highlights how patriarchy is reproduced and concomitant gender roles reproduced at the socio-spatial level of these communities. Thus, for some girls and young women who may wish to carry on with their education post primary school it may be too ‘dangerous’, using hooks terminology; there is still an expectation that they will get married and look after the home. However, it should be noted that for some young women this is what they want and are keen to adopt the gender norms of their communities, ‘as is their right’ (Hamilton, 2016:13). This was certainly the case for one of the young women in the focus group who wanted to get married young, despite telling me that ‘you have got authority over them when you’re courting them [boys]...But when you’re married they take over the father role basically and you come under their authority. But that’s better than anything really’. Such sentiments relate to Helleiner’s work (2003) who found that once young women were married they quickly adopted their gender specific role as housewife, and as Levinson and Sparkes (2006) found, felt proud of their domestic role in the ‘homeplace’, which to them represented their maturity and status as a woman over non-gypsy girls. Helleiner (2003:136) draws on ethnographic work with Irish Travellers and further noted: ‘...while some women reported having worked in casual jobs in laundries, supermarkets, and hotels this was usually before marriage...the overall involvement of married women in income-generating activities appeared to be minimal’.

It was clear from all the young women that I spoke to that the internalization of this idea of pride and status to get married is good for the community and the reputation of young women. However, for some this was not enough, and they were happy to challenge this destiny as this abstract from the focus group discussion highlights:

FG1: I’d like to be married now.

FG2: What for?

FG4: You’re going to be in the trailer probably, 18-years-old cooking and cleaning.

FG1: Yeah I know but I don’t go anywhere, as it is I might as well be married the way I am now. Because all I’m doing is cleaning and staying at home, what’s the difference?

1 Notice how the first young woman was happy to 'be married' whilst the others challenged this  
2 idea. I believe this demonstrates that perhaps peer pressure from some young women in these  
3 communities to get married was part of the covert gender regime, perpetuated by certain young  
4 women. Indeed, for Hamilton (2016:11) there still remains 'significant intolerance by some females  
5 within the community against' those women who want to remain in school and delay getting  
6 married. She notes how sometimes this would even lead to these women being bullied and made  
7 to feel guilty by other older women who were resistant to their daughters staying on in school. I  
8 wonder whether this was something that was going on for the first young women in the abstract  
9 above?

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20 However, it is usually the fathers that would often prevent their daughters staying on in school in  
21 order to ensure they were on track to marry and adopt a conventional domestic role. One of the  
22 young women I interviewed told me: 'I always had a choice whether I wanted to go to school. But  
23 then as I got older my dad didn't want me in school anymore...So he pulled me out of school and  
24 he said "That's your final year now" ...because he prefers me to be at home cleaning and cooking'.  
25 She went on to tell me how her mother (now passed away) was keen for her to carry on at school  
26 despite her father's resistance.

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36 According to one of the TESS, although they had also noticed a shift in thinking towards girls'  
37 attendance at school they often also encountered this type of resistance from fathers for their  
38 daughters to remain in school. On speaking with one of the head teachers it was further  
39 highlighted how patriarchy plays a key role in ensuring girls are 'on track' to marry and adopt  
40 their traditional gender roles within their communities as many mothers do not support their  
41 daughters' aspirations for change:

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51 ...We've got a bright girl in year 3 [7-8 years of age], but her...Mum is adamant that she  
52 will not go further than the end of Key Stage 2 [end of primary school at age 11], "she's  
53 going to be a mammy and this is all we want for her", her mother told me, and I've sort of  
54 said to her, but "you know I've read in the *Traveller Times* about girls going to university,  
55 having a career"; but she said "No those are the people who get pregnant before they're 16,  
56 those are the people who get divorced, we're not having that".  
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These sentiments perhaps expose the fear that even some mothers have about allowing their children to remain in school and mix with 'others' and demonstrates hooks (1994) 'danger zone'. It is clear to the mother above, for example, that the spaces of school expose children to other ways of thinking and perhaps become places that could lead to the construction of alternative identities (Hamilton, 2016). For this mother the aspirational route suggested by the head teacher is unrealistic and the most likely outcome is early pregnancy and divorce. A "little bit of freedom" away from traditional gender scripts is seen as risky and reinforcing traditional gender roles. For Gypsy communities this may be understood as affording protection from 'harm'. As Massey (1994:181-2) notes however, this has historically applied to women from many communities: 'The fact of escape from the spatial confines of the home is in itself a threat...in two ways: that it might subvert the willingness of women to perform their domestic roles and that it gave them entry into another, public, world – a life not defined by family and husband'.

### *Policing the gender boundaries*

Parental fear of mixing with others from non-traveller communities was also noted during the interview with one of the head teachers who told me that 'some parents are fearful that their daughters will spread their wings, will meet non-Traveller boys and marry out of the culture'. Consequently, increasingly 'Traveller women are subject to strict moral codes regarding their sexuality' (Kendall, 1997:80) and as a result fathers often police their whereabouts, forbidding them to go anywhere on their own, particularly the older young women (Powell, 2010). I was told during the focus group that:

FG2: We can't go anywhere on our own.

FG3: He [father] only let me come here to chaperone my sister, he didn't want me to come here [Education Centre].

FG1: The first time I came here xxxxxx [older sister] had to come with me because I'm not allowed to come on my own.

Girls are therefore 'subject to much more parental control' (Powell, 2010:485) and thus spatially restricted on where they can go and who they can see outside the spaces of their communities. As

the sentiments above note, young women are even chaperoned when outside the boundaries of their communities. This is not the case when the young women I spoke to, attended the education Centre, making this a unique space, which allowed them freedom to mix with others.

These young women went on to tell me about how their movements were restricted in the evenings and that 'you've always got to have somebody with you to vouch for you'. However, boys from the community do not face such restrictions and are 'allowed just to go off and go out with their girlfriends or whatever'. Another young woman noted that 'a girl's got to live up to her name, how she dresses, how she acts, who she goes about with, what she does, but boys can do what they want'. These sentiments clearly highlight the gender divisions between girls and boys in these communities and expose the power relations relating to the re-grouping of hegemonic masculinities. As Crickley (1992: 106) reminds us:

...when an ethnic group is under attack from external dominant groups, their oppressive control of female sexuality may be seen as a way of maintaining group boundaries as well as providing males in the group, already oppressed elsewhere, with ways of exercising some domination.

Consequently, men control women's space - the 'natural' sphere of Gypsy women is within the 'private' space of the home where it is easy to police their behaviour. When stepping outside the community space, the policing of their behaviour and time are achieved by not allowing them to be on their own. Consequently, girls are restricted outside the private spatial location of the Gypsy environment. Much has been written about the public/private divide (Rubin, 1975; Ortner and Whitehead, 1981; Sassoon, 1987; Pattenman, 1988; Landes, 1998) 'each assumed to be the 'natural' sphere of one or the other sex' (McDowell, 1999:31). Women have traditionally been associated with private space and men public space and 'that between the public and the private, between inside and outside – plays a central role in the social construction of gender divisions' (McDowell, 1999:12).

For many white feminists, this division between private space and public space for many women in Western Europe is 'one of the most oppressive aspects of everyday spaces' (Rose, 1993:17) which has long been associated with patriarchal power (Oakley, 1974; Millet, 1977; Walby, 1990).

Such divisions are still very much a significant part of the understanding of Gypsy communities, which in turn naturalizes the divisions that the 'homeplace' is the women's sphere and outside of that is the men's sphere and their responsibility, yet only in relation to their economic activity. It is very interesting that today Gypsy women have become more and more involved in dealing with the demands of mainstream institutions that take them out of the 'private' community space into the 'public' spaces of the mainstream. Consequently, it has become even more important in terms of patriarchal power for men to assert their dominance over their daughters to ensure that they get married within the community and remain in the 'homeplace'.

Maybe ironically, during the focus group the young women made it clear that they respected the word of their fathers' and how important it was for them to make their fathers' happy. They also told me that their reputation amongst others in the community was important to how they were perceived by others and their parents, with one of them noting that 'if you're not clean you get talked about...but as long as our home is clean that's the main thing'. As Tamboukou (1999:128) notes '[W]omen's sense of alienation from the everyday spaces of their lives is related to a fear, that they are always watched and evaluated'. So, despite these young women's attitudes towards their own independence, they were well aware of the deep-rooted community 'rules' surrounding women and girls in public spaces, and the importance placed on their reputation within the community. Likewise, the young women themselves also applied such 'rules' to their own behaviour and judged others by them, arguably colluding with the patriarchal 'regimes' of the community (Hamilton, 2016). Despite this deep-rooted understanding, at the same time it was also clear to the young women I spoke with that when spending time away from the community at the education Centre they were realizing the opportunity to get the most from education in order to protect their own independence, which has become extremely important to them:

FG2: ...if you did get married...I'd still want that job...then I can get things for my own self, knowing that I got there and I've done it myself. So if we did have a divorce, he can't turn around and say, "Well, give me such and such back."

Such sentiments expressed here clearly demonstrate the importance to this young woman of being economically independent. I consider that this further reveals the aspirational power of educational spaces as places that provide individuals with the confidence and determination to better one's life while challenging the spatial expectations of their communities.



## Conclusion

This article provides further empirical insight into of how gender relations are a key factor that often prevents children and young people from Traveller communities attending school or engaging with education. Boys and girls are expected to leave school between the ages of 11-14. Girls are required to look after younger siblings and adopt a domestic role, whilst boys gain employment with their fathers and other men from the community. They are thus socialized to associate the 'homeplace', or private sphere, with their mothers and the outside, or public sphere, with their fathers.

However, with increasing evidence that many more children and young people, but particularly girls and young women, are staying longer in education these children and young people are experiencing a different space. They are mixing and socialising with non-gypsy others and relating with them throughout the course of the day. The more they engage and socialize with others in this different space the more school can become a place in which to belong and aspire to something different. Although they are expected to marry and adopt a domestic role within their communities, as well as be careful with whom they mix with, engaging in education is allowing them to realise their independence and future aspirations. Such immersion in this different space away from the confines of their communities means these girls and young women are free to express themselves differently. They can even perhaps develop an alternative socio-spatial gender identity that leads them to do things otherwise and to 'reinvent' themselves. Therefore, for young women, there is more possibility of transformation; of being drawn in to a 'more public gender regime' (Walby, 1997: 62) with more diverse gender identities associated with it.

It is perhaps this determination to remain longer in schools and get the required skills to find work that has the potential to 'chip away' at the domestic gender regimes of these communities whereby 'the power of the patriarch is weakened and the rights of women...proclaimed' (Kitchens, 2007 as cited in Powell, 2010:480). With the backing of their mothers to remain in education for longer than they were, some young Gypsy women may be provided with this potential to challenge their gender roles. However, boys and young men are different, they are often eager to get to work with their fathers and will leave school at age 11, if they attend at all. The sociality

surrounding masculine identities within the 'homeplace' becomes their everyday reality. Schooling may have become increasingly normalised as a place that maybe acceptable for girls for a while in order to learn to read and write, whilst boys must leave as soon as possible to learn a trade in order to one day support their own families. Therefore, it is increasingly likely that boys who are socialized to adopt at a young age the conventional regimes of gender relations and adulthood status will in turn continue to reproduce the patriarchal control of women. Therefore, despite the positive increase in attendance at school by many girls and young women, it still remains a real challenge for them to stay in school long enough in order to gain qualifications required for future employment outside of their communities. In addition however, we may see increased tension within these communities as gender scripts for boys and young men and girls and young women diverge. This is perhaps why Gypsy and Traveller parents understand the education of girls to be potentially 'dangerous'.

On a final note, more research needs to be carried out with other parents and young people, but in particular with young men. It would also be interesting to re-visit the young women in this article, to find out if they had indeed achieved their ambitions. Further research from participants from other Travelling groups would also be beneficial including Irish, Scottish and Welsh Gypsies and Travellers.

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## "It's a bit of freedom away from home and cleaning all the time": Schooling, Gender Relations and Gypsy Communities in England

### **Abstract**

#### Purpose

Much has been written over the past 50 years about the concerns associated with the educational underachievement of Gypsy<sup>i</sup> children in England. This work has usually focused on ethnicity and mobility as key factors that affect school attendance. However it is only relatively recently that a concern with gender relations has entered the debate. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to provide an empirically driven contribution to this fledging area of enquiry. ~~In line with the idea that space and place are fundamental in formulating gender relations a further aim of this article is to frame this phenomenon within a socio-spatial context.~~

#### Design/methodology/approach

This article draws on semi-structured interview material and a focus group discussion about the educational experiences and aspirations of three mothers and six young women from the community. Further interview materials were collected from two head teachers with Gypsy children in their schools and two Traveller Education Support Staff.

#### Findings

This article finds how educational 'public' space are providing a place for girls and young women to think differently and even begin to challenge the gender regimes embedded within the 'private' space of their communities.

#### Originality/value

In line with the idea that space and place are fundamental in formulating gender relations this article frames this phenomenon within a socio-spatial context.

#### Key words:

Schooling, Challenging Gender Relations, Gypsies, Space.

## "It's a bit of freedom away from home and cleaning all the time": Schooling, Gender Relations and Gypsy Communities in England

### **Introduction**

Contemporary Gypsy culture remains traditionally patriarchal 'with men primarily responsible for supporting their family financially and practically...and women taking overall responsibility for the home and children' (Cemlyn et al, 2009:226). Young people from these communities learn through communal participation whereby family-based learning becomes paramount for the preservation and continuation of their unique cultural identity (Powell, 2010; Hamilton, 2016). There is a priority on the development of vocational skills rather than an emphasis on educational qualifications (Lloyd and McCluskey, 2008). With such a strong emphasis and focus on family and group orientation and learning, 'institutional' schooling is often not necessarily seen as that important, particularly beyond primary education (Cudworth, 2009, 2015; Derrington, 2007; Bloomer et al. 2014). What makes this situation unique is that both boys and girls from these communities are expected to adopt their gender roles at a young age (Powell, 2010; Bhopal, 2011; Hamilton, 2016), and awarded early adulthood status by the age of 14 (Myers et al. 2010; O'Hanlon, 2010). The majority of boys will be expected to leave school at around 11 years of age to join their older brothers, fathers and grandfathers in employment (Levinson & Sparkes, 2003, 2015; Powell, 2010). Girls, if they do go onto secondary school will usually leave to join their mothers in looking after younger siblings and the 'homeplace' on a full time basis until they get married and move out to look after their own home and children (Kendall, 1997; Cemlyn et al., 2009; Ryder et al., 2014; Derrington, 2016). Adherence to such strict gender relations is a contributing factor that often makes it difficult for these children to remain in school, and is becoming increasingly recognized as one of the key 'pull' factors away from school for these children (Derrington, 2007). It could be perceived that this non-engagement in schooling beyond primary education affects the children and young people's future aspirations. By not attending school, for example, Children are unable to relate otherwise and therefore perhaps unable to 'distance themselves from daily entanglements, and think about themselves and the world around them in a different way' (Tamboukou, 1999:136).

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3 However, there is increasing evidence that suggests a change in parental attitudes towards the  
4 merits of 'institutionalised' schooling, particularly for girls and young women from these  
5 communities (Smith, 1997; Kendall, 1997; Bhopal, 2004; O'Hanlon, 2010; Powell, 2010; Bedmar &  
6 Leon, 2012; Hamilton, 2016). Such a shift in attitudes towards girls and schooling has initially  
7 been attributed to the importance of literacy and the need for girls to be able to read and write in  
8 order to engage increasingly with the institutional spaces of the mainstream and gain access to  
9 resources (Kendall, 1997; Ryder et al., 2014). From the premise that 'Space is fundamental in any  
10 exercise of power [and] is especially vital when structuring gender relations' (Tamboukou,  
11 2003:66), this article is interested in how spaces are produced via social relations in places. That is  
12 to say that places determine the formation of particular types of identities and hierarchical  
13 positions that are required to reproduce the wider structural notions of relations and power in  
14 space (Lefebvre, 1991); in this case patriarchy and gender power relations. This article is thus  
15 concerned with the tensions of educational spaces (public) and home spaces (private) and argues  
16 that schools could potentially offer young women from such communities a different spatial  
17 environment in which to aspire to be something different and even begin to challenge the socio-  
18 spatial expectations of their communities.  
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37 It is not the purpose of this article to provide a conclusive account of the schooling experiences of  
38 both Gypsy boys and girls. The main intention is to provide further awareness of this developing  
39 research area that focuses on gender from a spatial perspective in order to stimulate further  
40 debate.  
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### 46 **The context of the study**

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50 The qualitative data on which this article draws comprised of a range of discussions with  
51 individuals from the indigenous English Romany Gypsy community. These discussions,  
52 conducted in English, consisted of a focus group with four young women aged sixteen, two in-  
53 depth semi-structured interviews with two other young women of similar age and three mothers  
54 from the community. Further interview data was also collected from two head teachers and two  
55 Traveller Education Support Service staff (TESS). As questions were kept to a minimum all  
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participants were free to openly share their experiences, and as such generated some in-depth data.

Participants from the communities were initially identified by one of the TESS who was already known to the author and had over 10 years' experience of working with these communities. The author also knew the two head teachers of schools where previous ethnographic studies had been carried out. One of the parents attended an alternative education setting with their child. This setting was contacted and the author was invited to speak with the parent. Despite such a small study sample, the focus group and each of the semi-structured interviews, which were recorded and transcribed by the author, lasted between 1-1 ½ hours and as such contained some rich narrative data. Needless to say, information presented in this article cannot be presented, as a representative picture for all English Romany Gypsies, and thus further data is required. However, what is presented here is based on original data and does go some way in illustrating some of the key factors concerning gender relations and the schooling and these communities.

All participants were informed that they were taking part in a study that looked at possible tensions around school attendance. They were told that their stories would remain confidential and their identities would remain anonymous. Therefore further demographic details or information as to where the interviews took place has not been disclosed. In line with further ethical approval, after transcription the audio files were deleted and transcripts anonymised and password protected.

It is well-known that there is a high level of suspicion among Gypsy communities towards those who are not part of their culture (Casey, 2014), so it was important for the author to establish trust. In light of this, the positive relationships the author had already developed with the TESS enabled them to act as 'gatekeepers' to the communities. The gatekeepers introduced the author to parents via the TESS workplaces with one interview conducted in a private office in the workplace, one on a site and the other in an alternative educational setting. It was during the workplace interview that the author obtained written consent from the parent to also interview her daughter. The focus group discussion was organised by the author in an alternative Education Centre where an undergraduate student was carrying out placement experience. The Centre manager had gained

informed consent from the parents of the young women who took part in the focus group as well as the other young woman who was individually interviewed at the Centre.

Due to the in-depth nature of the empirical data collected, this data represented the stories (or narratives) of the participants' experiences of schooling and as such signified these individual's internal understanding of the schooling system and how they engaged with it. Their narratives also represented the external characteristics of being part of that schooling process; in that their narratives were socially co-constructed. Data was thus analysed using narrative analysis and concerned with the gendered spatial processes involved in the construction and challenges of gender relations embedded in Gypsy communities.

Narrative research lends itself to analysing stories via a spatial perspective in order to examine the power dynamics at play. In this case how gender relations played out in the minds of participants and how educational spaces could provide them the ability to aspire to do something different. Consequently, data gathered represented the perceptions of participants in relation to their ideas and experiences of schooling and gender relations that often see boys leaving school early to gain employment and girls adopting a domestic role. As Gulson and Symes (2007:98) suggest 'stories and narratives mediate the way space is apprehended and comprehended. The language of exclusion is, by and large, spatial; who's in, who's out, at the heart, on the margins.'

Places are arenas of social interaction and practice that are co-constituent of power relations and thus the embodiment of wider power relations (Massey, 2004). Space encapsulates these macro power relations that in turn are played out and replicated in the places of our everyday sociality and can be understood through our narratives (Tamboukou, 2003). As products of sociality, places determine the formation of particular types of identities and hierarchical positions that are required to reproduce the wider structural notions of relations and power in space (Lefebvre, 1991); in this case gender power relations.

## **Patriarchy and Gender Relations**

...the everyday routines traced by women are never unimportant, because the seemingly banal and trivial events of the everyday are bound into the power structures which limit and confine women (Rose, 1993:17).

The acquisition of gender roles is particularly astute for older Gypsy children where 'boys acquire more rights and fewer obligations than girls' (Smith, 1997:246). For these boys and girls their gender roles are still very much clearly defined and reproduced within the everyday places of their communities. This article is informed by the idea that these gender roles are a socio-spatially constructed phenomenon (Lorber & Farrell, 1991; Risman, 2004), which act to construct and embody particular 'cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity' (Casey, 2014:808) and played out in the places we interact with others. As McDowell (1999:11) notes, in order to establish and normalize particular power relations based on sexual difference such ideas are 'deeply embedded in our sense of ourselves as individuals in daily interactions, in institutional structures and in Western intellectual thought'. As a result 'spaces and places, and our senses of them...are gendered through and through' (Massey, 2004:186).

Consequently, places continue to embed patriarchal power relations that define the sociality of that place and set up spatial boundaries (Sibley, 1995) or 'spatial codes' (Lefebvre, 1991:16) that normalize relations around the gender divisions of men and women in a place, whereby 'women are one thing and men are the opposite' (McDowell, 1991:11). Such thinking and gender-appropriate power relations are reproduced in the structures (spatial regimes) and practices and experiences of Gypsy women and men (Casey, 2014; Hamilton, 2016), and spatially organised 'according to assigned masculine and feminine gender identities' (Jaggar: 2014:6). These gender boundaries are 'both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience' (McDowell, 1999:4).

Since the 1960s much has been written by feminist thinkers, particularly in the UK and the wider EU, Australia and the US, to challenge these power relations, predominantly in relation to women's role in society and the places they occupy (including: Oakley, 1974; Millet, 1977; Ortnner & Whitehead, 1981; Rose, 1993; Massey, 1994; Paechter, 1998; Blackmore, 1999; McDowell, 1999; Tamboukou, 1999; Walby, 1990, 1997, 2011). As a result the condition of many women's lives in these countries has increasingly improved. Emancipation from the (private) domestic space has



played a significant role in these improvements. Rose (2000) notes that '[f]or many women...the home is a site of hard work and perhaps physical and sexual abuse; for some, only by leaving such homes can they find a place in which to belong' (p.90). By entering the public sphere many women have been able to 'gain better access to education, employment and political representation' (Walby, 2011:4). Furthermore, Walby notes that more and more 'women of working age derive a significant part of their livelihood from waged labour' (Walby 2011:5). This article is concerned that such a transformation from the domestic space to the public space has not been inclusive of many women from Gypsy communities, particularly married women (Casey, 2014). What exacerbates the spatial marginalisation from public space for women from these communities is the wider context of discrimination they experience due to the historical stigmatization of mobile communities across Europe (Picker, 2017). Shubin (2011) notes how their mobility is not viewed as 'respectable', and simply associated with avoiding being governable. Further work from Humphries (2017:1193) highlights further how state governance frames particular discourse around motherhood, which produces and organises 'specific types of behaviour'. By adopting an intermittent school attendance record due to being mobile, such communities are often then perceived as not taking the education of their children seriously. Consequently, when engaging with the institutional spaces of the mainstream world, these communities remain 'othered' and often struggle to become accepted by all schools (CudworthAuthor, 20157).

Rather than a focus on ethnicity and racism, in turning attention to the empirical data, this article will highlight how the power relations set up by the socio-spatial construction of gender within Gypsy communities' attempt to reaffirm specific gender roles for boys and girls in these communities, which often makes it difficult for them to remain in school.

### Place, Space and Gender

This girl said to me one time, 'what is the point of me going to school, I'm going to get married and have children and tidy the trailer all day.' It is very patriarchal, girls get married very young. (TESS 1)

We can see from the above quote and the one below from one of the young women in the focus group discussion, how the domestic gender regime often spatially segregates girls and boys at a young age which makes it hard for them to attend school on a regular bases, if at all:

FG 1: I was just forever doing the same thing every day, getting up and cleaning and cooking. Getting my dad's stuff ready and getting all my brothers stuff ready...My brother's been working with my dad since he was about 10...They are expected to be a man at 10.

Therefore by spending more time within the 'private' space of the community rather than the 'public' space of the school and mixing with others, these young men and women are socialized to accept their domestic role. However, increasing evidence that suggests a shifting landscape of parental attitudes towards the value of schooling for their daughters was confirmed by the TESS I spoke with and one of the young women I interviewed who told me that 'Boys finish education at 11 and work, girls tend to stay on and are expected to learn to read and write'. Another young woman I interviewed informed me that her mother told her 'you're going to school because you do need to learn to read and write'. This shift in thinking was also supported by the three parents I spoke with who all encouraged their daughters to remain longer in school. Having the support and encouragement of their mothers who 'allow their daughters to do something more than getting married at a young age' (Hamilton, 2016:9) is perhaps resulting in some girls and young women attending schools more readily and staying on longer beyond primary school. The role of mothers in the education and upward mobility of their children in general and daughters in particular has been a constant theme in the literature of class mobility in education (Reay, 1998; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall, 2008; Vincent, 2010; Sabates et al., 2011). For many Gypsy girls it is as if they have permission from their mothers to become attached to the school space so that it becomes a comfortable and legitimate cultural place for them to be in (Hamilton, 2016). Thus, once in the 'public' space of some schools, Gypsy girls are able to mix and interact with non-gypsy others where they can explore ideas that may be counter to the domestic 'private sphere' of their communities.

### *Boys and Schooling*

The schooling of boys has not seen an equivalent shift in thinking and cultural pressure for boys to work is perhaps often too strong to provide sons with the same educational opportunities as their sisters (Hamilton, 2016; Levinson & Sparkes, 2003). These sentiments were exemplified by one of the head teachers I spoke with who told me that a parent with two daughters and a son told *her* how it was 'becoming ok for girls to stay on in school but not the case for boys' and that 'he's only twelve, he's not in school, he's not moving on with his education at all whereas my two girls are continuing'. With these boys being 'pulled' out of school early and less able to mix with others, than Gypsy girls, these Gypsy boys are less likely to get an opportunity to think differently about their lives.

Furthermore, pressure from fathers and other men that require boys to go to work with them seems to be paramount and '[i]t can be difficult for boys in particular to be still at school at fifteen or sixteen as their fathers may feel they should be out earning a living' (Blaney, ~~as cited in Tyler,~~ 2005:110). Casey (2014:812) notes how '[m]en make the final decisions as to the length of schooling appropriate for their sons and, to a lesser extent, their daughters'. However, what may also be at play here is that the boys themselves may find gaining employment unproblematic as many of them very often aspire to follow their fathers into manual trades (Bowers, 2004). One mother told me, for example, that her 11 year old son "can't wait to get to work, he's nagging me now". It may be that leaving school and joining their fathers in work enables them to prove their masculinity via 'apprenticeship to older male relatives' (Levison and Sparkes, 2003:590). Levinson and Sparkes (2003:599) found that 'Males of all ages spoke with pride of going out to learn trades and skills with older males....[and] spoke of a sense of liberation'.

Due to the historical existence of 'a strong male power base' (Hamilton, 2016:3) this expectation to work is reproduced by these boys via their social relations of the lived places of their communities that continue to spatially divide them away from school. Qualities such as 'business skills, physical strength, loyalty, sexual prowess and potency' are very much valued by Gypsy men (Levison & Sparkes, 2003:588); and school is often perceived by fathers as 'inculcating boys with an altogether less masculine identity' (Levison & Sparkes, 2003:599). Although boys were expected to learn to read and write (particularly with the introduction of the driving theory test), there is a 'suspicion not only of the skills gained through exposure to the education system, but of values

and attitudes that threatened traditional, masculine identities' (Levison and Sparkes, 2003:601). Such sentiments relate to earlier debates around the relationships between social class, education, work and masculinities (see Willis, 1977) whereby boys often failed to apply themselves at school as this would have invoked a challenge to their masculinity.

### *Making the break – Girls and Schooling*

Despite pressure from some families it is clear that many mothers are keen to provide their daughters with the opportunity of staying on longer at school (Hamilton, 2016). On entering a site to interview one of the parents it became clear to me how young women and mothers were arguably provided with opportunities in which to begin to discuss the gender situation of their daughters. There were no men around, just other mothers, young women and children, which is typical of Gypsy sites during the day (Casey, 2014). As Kendal (1997:83) suggests 'Women control the inside of the trailer, especially when the men are away during the day, then it becomes primarily 'their' space [a] spatial environment where women can have control'.

Thus, via the daily interactions on their sites young women and mothers are arguably provided with occasions in which to maybe challenge gender relations at the lived dimension of this place. I was told by one of the young women, for example, that her mother encouraged her to stay on at school; and was told "that you have enough time to settle down and get married when you are actually old enough". This young woman added that 'there's hundreds and hundreds of things that I want to do and obviously you can't go through this world without qualifications and you're not going to get anywhere without getting a job'. Such ideas could potentially then be developed further when in schools whilst socializing and mixing with others away from their communities.

The desire for young women to delay the domestic gender expectations of their communities could provide them with the opportunity to re-configure their own gender identity; as illustrated here by one of the young women from the focus group who told me:

FG 2: I wanted to go to college and be something in life, rather than stay at home, cleaning up, cooking, washing dishes, watching kids and then it's like you get to 17 and its get married.

At the heart of this desire to delay getting married and adopting their gender role, was clearly related to getting an education. It was very clear to all the young women that I spoke with, for example, that schooling was the space that would provide them with a place in which to think differently and perhaps offer them the ability to do things outside the gender expectations of their communities. In this second quote from another one of the young women in the focus group, it is clear that education is providing a different route, other than marriage, whereby education will lead to employment at the end of it:

FG 4: I don't want to get married, I want to live my life, I want to go on holiday and I want to get a job, I want to fend for myself.

I am reminded here of the work of Tamboukou (1999) which provides evidence of how some women resist 'the space restrictions imposed upon their lives, claiming space of their own, sometimes creating new space boundaries for themselves but also imagining different spaces beyond masculinist geographical closures' (1999:127). For the young women I spoke with it was clear that the Education Center was enabling them to 'claim their own space'. They were very aware that by extending their education would provide them with the independence that they so desired away from the spatial boundaries of their 'masculinist' communities. As Tamboukou (2003:62) further notes: 'Setting boundaries of their own space and taking full control of it, is certainly important in women's perceptions of independence'. We can see here by the following sentiments from two of the young women how by taking control of their education would provide them with independence and the ability to have their own money:

FG1: I want my own independence; you know what I mean. This is why I come here trying to get qualifications. I used to hate going to my dad and asking for money when I was going out. I thought, no, I want my own bit of money.

FG3: I want to be independent because you have to sit at home and wait for him [husband] to give you money. I want to have my own job and my own independence. That's why I'm here.

It is clear that for these girls attending the Education Centre would eventually lead to employment and therefore economic independence. This 'public' space afforded these young women a sense of freedom away from the constraints of the 'private' lived spaces of their sites. One of the young

women who was 'pulled' out of the Centre for a while by her father, told me that she 'did start to miss it because it's a bit of freedom away from home and cleaning all the time'. Another young woman told me '...it's like I wake up in the morning and I'm going to do that again and again and again [cooking and cleaning] ...I'm so bored with it and then when I come here [Education Centre] I was like proper excited it was like "yeah freedom"'.

This sense of freedom felt by these young women in the Education Centre in relation to their 'homeplace' relates to the flexible nature of wider spaces and how the social relations with others can establish spaces as 'comfortable' places in which to challenge norms and to feel attached and 'belong' to a place (Tuan, 1977). Writing about her own school experience in her book 'Teaching to Transgress' (1994:3), hooks makes this point eloquently:

Attending school then was sheer joy...School was the place of ecstasy – pleasure and danger. To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure. But to learn ideas that ran counter to values and beliefs learned at home was to place oneself at risk, to enter the danger zone. Home was the place where I was forced to conform to someone else's image of who and what I should be. School was the place where I could forget that self and, through ideas, reinvent myself.

'The danger zone' for the young Gypsy women I spoke with was maybe to aspire to something other than getting married, cooking, cleaning and looking after children. They wanted to construct their own lives, get a job and become independent and thus for some maybe even challenge gender relations. It was clear from the mothers and young women I spoke with that attending school afforded many of them with the opportunity and the space to relate otherwise as well as provide them with the material resources to 'reinvent' themselves (Hamilton, 2016) via social relations with non-gypsy others.

### *Patriarchal Backlash*

However, for many girls and young women to aspire to something other than the expected cultural norms of their communities can often be challenging. More often than not many fathers are reluctant for their daughters to 'reinvent' themselves. I was told by one young woman, for example, that her father did not want her to work and that 'he totally hates girls working because



he prefers me to be at home cleaning and cooking “but I thought no way I want to do something else”. Consequently, pressure to leave school is still acute, and perhaps highlights how patriarchy is reproduced and concomitant gender roles reproduced at the socio-spatial level of these communities. Thus, for some girls and young women who may wish to carry on with their education post primary school it may be too ‘dangerous’, using hooks terminology; there is still an expectation that they will get married and look after the home. However, it should be noted that for some young women this is what they want and are keen to adopt the gender norms of their communities, ‘as is their right’ (Hamilton, 2016:13). This was certainly the case for one of the young women in the focus group who wanted to get married young, despite telling me that ‘you have got authority over them when you’re courting them [boys]...But when you’re married they take over the father role basically and you come under their authority. But that’s better than anything really’. Such sentiments relate to Helleiner’s work (2003) who found that once young women were married they quickly adopted their gender specific role as housewife, and as Levinson and Sparkes (2006) found, felt proud of their domestic role in the ‘homeplace’, which to them represented their maturity and status as a woman over non-gypsy girls. Helleiner (2003:136) draws on ethnographic work with Irish Travellers and further noted: ‘...while some women reported having worked in casual jobs in laundries, supermarkets, and hotels this was usually before marriage...the overall involvement of married women in income-generating activities appeared to be minimal’.

It was clear from all the young women that I spoke to that the internalization of this idea of pride and status to get married is good for the community and the reputation of young women. However, for some this was not enough, and they were happy to challenge this destiny as this abstract from the focus group discussion highlights:

FG1: I’d like to be married now.

FG2: What for?

FG4: You’re going to be in the trailer probably, 18-years-old cooking and cleaning.

FG1: Yeah I know but I don’t go anywhere, as it is I might as well be married the way I am now. Because all I’m doing is cleaning and staying at home, what’s the difference?

Notice how the first young woman was happy to 'be married' whilst the others challenged this idea. I believe this demonstrates that perhaps peer pressure from some young women in these communities to get married was part of the covert gender regime, perpetuated by certain young women. Indeed, for Hamilton (2016:11) there still remains 'significant intolerance by some females within the community against' those women who want to remain in school and delay getting married. She notes how sometimes this would even lead to these women being bullied and made to feel guilty by other older women who were resistant to their daughters staying on in school. I wonder whether this was something that was going on for the first young women in the abstract above?

However, it is usually the fathers that would often prevent their daughters staying on in school in order to ensure they were on track to marry and adopt a conventional domestic role. One of the young women I interviewed told me: 'I always had a choice whether I wanted to go to school. But then as I got older my dad didn't want me in school anymore...So he pulled me out of school and he said "That's your final year now" ...because he prefers me to be at home cleaning and cooking'. She went on to tell me how her mother (now passed away) was keen for her to carry on at school despite her father's resistance.

According to one of the TESS, although they had also noticed a shift in thinking towards girls' attendance at school they often also encountered this type of resistance from fathers for their daughters to remain in school. On speaking with one of the head teachers it was further highlighted how patriarchy plays a key role in ensuring girls are 'on track' to marry and adopt their traditional gender roles within their communities as many mothers do not support their daughters' aspirations for change:

...We've got a bright girl in year 3 [7-8 years of age], but her...Mum is adamant that she will not go further than the end of Key Stage 2 [end of primary school at age 11], "she's going to be a mammy and this is all we want for her", her mother told me, and I've sort of said to her, but "you know I've read in the *Traveller Times* about girls going to university, having a career"; but she said "No those are the people who get pregnant before they're 16, those are the people who get divorced, we're not having that".

These sentiments perhaps expose the fear that even some mothers have about allowing their children to remain in school and mix with 'others' and demonstrates hooks (1994) 'danger zone'. It is clear to the mother above, for example, that the spaces of school expose children to other ways of thinking and perhaps become places that could lead to the construction of alternative identities (Hamilton, 2016). For this mother the aspirational route suggested by the head teacher is unrealistic and the most likely outcome is early pregnancy and divorce. A "little bit of freedom" away from traditional gender scripts is seen as risky and reinforcing traditional gender roles. For Gypsy communities this may be understood as affording protection from 'harm'. As Massey (1994:181-2) notes however, this has historically applied to women from many communities: 'The fact of escape from the spatial confines of the home is in itself a threat...in two ways: that it might subvert the willingness of women to perform their domestic roles and that it gave them entry into another, public, world – a life not defined by family and husband'.

### *Policing the gender boundaries*

Parental fear of mixing with others from non-traveller communities was also noted during the interview with one of the head teachers who told me that 'some parents are fearful that their daughters will spread their wings, will meet non-Traveller boys and marry out of the culture'. Consequently, increasingly 'Traveller women are subject to strict moral codes regarding their sexuality' (Kendall, 1997:80) and as a result fathers often police their whereabouts, forbidding them to go anywhere on their own, particularly the older young women (Powell, 2010). I was told during the focus group that:

FG2: We can't go anywhere on our own.

FG3: He [father] only let me come here to chaperone my sister, he didn't want me to come here [Education Centre].

FG1: The first time I came here xxxxxx [older sister] had to come with me because I'm not allowed to come on my own.

Girls are therefore 'subject to much more parental control' (Powell, 2010:485) and thus spatially restricted on where they can go and who they can see outside the spaces of their communities. As

the sentiments above note, young women are even chaperoned when outside the boundaries of their communities. This is not the case when the young women I spoke to, attended the education Centre, making this a unique space, which allowed them freedom to mix with others.

These young women went on to tell me about how their movements were restricted in the evenings and that 'you've always got to have somebody with you to vouch for you'. However, boys from the community do not face such restrictions and are 'allowed just to go off and go out with their girlfriends or whatever'. Another young woman noted that 'a girl's got to live up to her name, how she dresses, how she acts, who she goes about with, what she does, but boys can do what they want'. These sentiments clearly highlight the gender divisions between girls and boys in these communities and expose the power relations relating to the re-grouping of hegemonic masculinities. As Crickley (1992: 106) reminds us:

...when an ethnic group is under attack from external dominant groups, their oppressive control of female sexuality may be seen as a way of maintaining group boundaries as well as providing males in the group, already oppressed elsewhere, with ways of exercising some domination.

Consequently, men control women's space - the 'natural' sphere of Gypsy women is within the 'private' space of the home where it is easy to police their behaviour. When stepping outside the community space, the policing of their behaviour and time are achieved by not allowing them to be on their own. Consequently, girls are restricted outside the private spatial location of the Gypsy environment. Much has been written about the public/private divide (Rubin, 1975; Ortner and Whitehead, 1981; Sassoon, 1987; Patterman, 1988; Landes, 1998) 'each assumed to be the 'natural' sphere of one or the other sex' (McDowell, 1999:31). Women have traditionally been associated with private space and men public space and 'that between the public and the private, between inside and outside - plays a central role in the social construction of gender divisions' (McDowell, 1999:12).

For many white feminists, this division between private space and public space for many women in Western Europe is 'one of the most oppressive aspects of everyday spaces' (Rose, 1993:17) which has long been associated with patriarchal power (Oakley, 1974; Millet, 1977; Walby, 1990).

Such divisions are still very much a significant part of the understanding of Gypsy communities, which in turn naturalizes the divisions that the 'homeplace' is the women's sphere and outside of that is the men's sphere and their responsibility, yet only in relation to their economic activity. It is very interesting that today Gypsy women have become more and more involved in dealing with the demands of mainstream institutions that take them out of the 'private' community space into the 'public' spaces of the mainstream. Consequently, it has become even more important in terms of patriarchal power for men to assert their dominance over their daughters to ensure that they get married within the community and remain in the 'homeplace'.

Maybe ironically, during the focus group the young women made it clear that they respected the word of their fathers' and how important it was for them to make their fathers' happy. They also told me that their reputation amongst others in the community was important to how they were perceived by others and their parents, with one of them noting that 'if you're not clean you get talked about...but as long as our home is clean that's the main thing'. As Tamboukou (1999:128) notes '[W]omen's sense of alienation from the everyday spaces of their lives is related to a fear, that they are always watched and evaluated'. So, despite these young women's attitudes towards their own independence, they were well aware of the deep-rooted community 'rules' surrounding women and girls in public spaces, and the importance placed on their reputation within the community. Likewise, the young women themselves also applied such 'rules' to their own behaviour and judged others by them, arguably colluding with the patriarchal 'regimes' of the community (Hamilton, 2016). Despite this deep-rooted understanding, at the same time it was also clear to the young women I spoke with that when spending time away from the community at the education Centre they were realizing the opportunity to get the most from education in order to protect their own independence, which has become extremely important to them:

FG2: ...if you did get married...I'd still want that job...then I can get things for my own self, knowing that I got there and I've done it myself. So if we did have a divorce, he can't turn around and say, "Well, give me such and such back."

Such sentiments expressed here clearly demonstrate the importance to this young woman of being economically independent. I consider that this further reveals the aspirational power of educational spaces as places that provide individuals with the confidence and determination to better one's life while challenging the spatial expectations of their communities.

## Conclusion

This article provides further empirical insight into of how gender relations are a key factor that often prevents children and young people from Traveller communities attending school or engaging with education. Boys and girls are expected to leave school between the ages of 11-14. Girls are required to look after younger siblings and adopt a domestic role, whilst boys gain employment with their fathers and other men from the community. They are thus socialized to associate the 'homeplace', or private sphere, with their mothers and the outside, or public sphere, with their fathers.

However, with increasing evidence that many more children and young people, but particularly girls and young women, are staying longer in education these children and young people are experiencing a different space. They are mixing and socialising with non-gypsy others and relating with them throughout the course of the day. The more they engage and socialize with others in this different space the more school can become a place in which to belong and aspire to something different. Although they are expected to marry and adopt a domestic role within their communities, as well as be careful with whom they mix with, engaging in education is allowing them to realise their independence and future aspirations. Such immersion in this different space away from the confines of their communities means these girls and young women are free to express themselves differently. They can even perhaps develop an alternative socio-spatial gender identity that leads them to do things otherwise and to 'reinvent' themselves. Therefore, for young women, there is more possibility of transformation; of being drawn in to a 'more public gender regime' (Walby, 1997: 62) with more diverse gender identities associated with it.

It is perhaps this determination to remain longer in schools and get the required skills to find work that has the potential to 'chip away' at the domestic gender regimes of these communities whereby 'the power of the patriarch is weakened and the rights of women...proclaimed' (Kitchens, 2007 as cited in Powell, 2010:480). With the backing of their mothers to remain in education for longer than they were, some young Gypsy women may be provided with this potential to challenge their gender roles. However, boys and young men are different, they are often eager to



get to work with their fathers and will leave school at age 11, if they attend at all. The sociality surrounding masculine identities within the 'homeplace' becomes their everyday reality. Schooling may have become increasingly normalised as a place that maybe acceptable for girls for a while in order to learn to read and write, whilst boys must leave as soon as possible to learn a trade in order to one day support their own families. Therefore, it is increasingly likely that boys who are socialized to adopt at a young age the conventional regimes of gender relations and adulthood status will in turn continue to reproduce the patriarchal control of women. Therefore, despite the positive increase in attendance at school by many girls and young women, it still remains a real challenge for them to stay in school long enough in order to gain qualifications required for future employment outside of their communities. In addition however, we may see increased tension within these communities as gender scripts for boys and young men and girls and young women diverge. This is perhaps why Gypsy and Traveller parents understand the education of girls to be potentially 'dangerous'.

On a final note, more research needs to be carried out with other parents and young people, but in particular with young men. It would also be interesting to re-visit the young women in this article, to find out if they had indeed achieved their ambitions. Further research from participants from other Travelling groups would also be beneficial including Irish, Scottish and Welsh Gypsies and Travellers.

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<sup>i</sup> This article focuses on English Romany Gypsies, often identified as English Gypsies or English Travellers; there are of course a range of other Gypsy communities including Welsh Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Roma and New Age Travellers. It is recognized that each of these communities have different histories, languages and cultural traditions (see Acton, 1997; Leigeois, 1986)).